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ABSTRACT

Until recently, culture (a collectively held set of values and assumptions) was not considered as a factor in the process of development. Now, however, culture is recognized as the heart of the development process. What policies promote a sustainable development process that encourages the flowering of human culture? Cultural freedom is a prerequisite for the flowering of culture and the development of a country. At the same time, education is fundamental to the growth and renewal of culture, and culture should be integrated into the academic curriculum at all levels. Children need to be educated with a sense of their culture and an openness and respect for other cultures. Therefore, cultural policy, as one of the main components of sustainable development policy, should be implemented in coordination with policy in other social areas, using an integrated approach. (KC)

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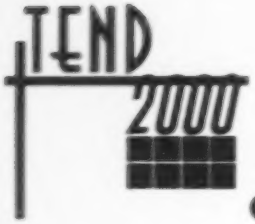

Crossroads of the New Millennium

Culture And Sustainable Development

Prepared and Presented

By

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Sunday 9 April, 2000

Theme Speaker

A Billingsley

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Culture and Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

At the outset, I would like to apologise to the organisers of the conference for changing the title of my speech from their suggested, " Culture at the Crossroads: into its present form, "Culture and Sustainable Development". The main reason for the shift of emphasis is related to the complex socio-economic stage through which present day UAE in general, and Dubai, in particular, is passing.

At present Dubai is laying down the foundations for sustainable development. It has a world class service sector like hotels, communications, electricity...etc, together with a well connected air links to the most important world destinations, coupled with a well maintained first class road network. An advance public health and educational systems are also well looked after.

In addition to this world class infrastructure, Dubai is characterised by social tranquility and a high level of security service which makes the Emirate a more attractive place to live and work. This is why all the government agencies in Dubai are working together to make it the city of excellence and a world class centre for business and trade, attracting diversified nationalities, from different cultural backgrounds - a truly cosmopolitan city.

CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Only ten years back or so, culture was considered as an exogenous factor in almost all the development models, especially the neo-classical models of growth. And if the topic which I am outlining now has been raised in a classroom then, ie. culture is considered as part and parcel of development models, any professor, and there are many amongst this distinguished audience, would have described this apprehension as utopia, to say the least.

Culture was not considered as part of development thinking except recently, ie. when the World Commission on Culture and Development has submitted its report entitled, "Our Creative Diversity" to UNESCO and the United Nations in November 1995. The gist of this report is that, "Development divorced from its human or cultural context is growth without a soul. Economic Development in its full flowering is part of a people's culture."

Therefore, the question at the heart of the development process is this: what policies promote a sustainable development that encourages the flowering of different cultures? This question directly leads to the concept of human development, for which you are most concerned, and which refers to the individual human being, who is both the ultimate objective of development and one of the most important instruments or means to it. An alert, skilled, educated, well-nourished, healthy, well-motivated labor force is the most productive asset of society.

Since people were together, co-operate, compete and interact in many ways, culture connects them with one another and makes the development process possible. Therefore, development and the economy are part of a people's culture. Hence, culture is not only a means to material progress, but it is also then end and "development" is considered as flourishing of human existence in all its forms and as an integrated whole.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

The word 'culture' stems from the Latin "colere" translatable as to build on, to cultivate, to foster. In the early stages of the philosophical debate about what is 'culture', the term often refers to the opposite of 'nature', where 'culture' was referring to something constructed willingly by men, while nature was given in itself.

The concept of culture has so many diversified definitions which could be summarised as follows:

- Topical: Culture consists of everything on a list of topics, or categories such as social organisations, religion…..etc.
- Historical: Culture is social heritage or tradition that is passed on to future generations.
- Behavioural: Culture is shared, learned human behaviour, a way of life.
- Normative: Culture is ideals, values, or rules of living.
- Functional: Culture is the way humans solve problems, adapting to the environment or living together.
- Mental: Culture is a complex of ideas and learned habits that distinguish people from animal.

So, it is clear that it is rather difficult to adopt a single unified definition of culture. But in our present context, we will adopt the definition of culture as the collectively held set of attributes, i.e., shared values, believes and basic assumptions, which is dynamic and changing over time.

THE POWER OF CULTURE

We are living at present in a culturally value-added world. Two aspects will suffice to illustrate the point:

Creativity: allows us to re-invent every day life, the way we live. Creativity allows us to re-invent meanings and responses. Creativity allows us to shape and design our future destination. That is the power of culture. It unites people around some key principles: infinite diversity and universal values. Our hope for the future lies in the limitless powers of the creative imagination.

Interaction: everybody who uses more than one language, who interact with people of different backgrounds or nationalities, face to face, by fax, phone, e-mail, over the Internet, everyone who does this is drawing constantly on his cultural resources and on his ability to engage with cultural diversity. This again is a power of culture.

CULTURAL FREEDOM

UNESCO's Report stresses cultural freedom as a prerequisite for the realisation of the power of culture but it also states that it is not quite like other forms of freedom because:

Firstly: most Freedoms refer to the individual. Cultural Freedom, in contrast, is a collective freedom. It refers to the right of a group of people to follow or adopt a way of life of their own choice.

Secondly: Cultural freedom is guarantee of freedom as a whole. It protects not only the collectivity but also the rights of every individual within it.

Thirdly: by protecting alternative ways of living. Cultural freedom encourages creativity and diversity - the very essentials of human development.

Fourthly: freedom is central to culture, and in particular the freedom to decide what we have reason to value, and what lives we have reason to seek.

One of the most basic needs of marketing is to be left free to define his own basic needs. This need is being threatened by a combination of global pressure and global neglect.

CULTURE AND GLOBALISATION

Globalisation is a process affecting almost every part and every aspect of today's world. It is apparent in the growth and extension of international trade, linked to the search for world markets and economies of scale, in the new forms of the international labor markets, in the global financial flows that take no account of national frontiers, in the development of TNCs or multinational enterprises based on cross frontier alliances.

Therefore it is logical to say that international inter-dependence is great, has increased, and will continue to grow. Rapid progress in transport and communications have shrunk the world. With a rise of the Internet around the globe, intercultural communications become " a mouse click away". The international spread of cultural processes, however, is at least as important as that of economic process. Globalising cultural processes entails the danger of the demise of other cultures, the societies of which do not command strong holds in the international economy or global information network.

But globalisation has two components: those who 'globalise' and those who are 'globalised'. I would like to make it absolutely clear that given our strong cultural heritage, we will be among those who 'globalise' and will work hard in order not to be 'globalised'.

We will also work hard to step beyond the view of development that sees nothing but macroeconomic growth achievements and to include all aspects of culture in it and put all spheres of knowledge in its service through more effective educational system.

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Education is fundamental not only to the transmission of culture but to preparing the ground for its continuous renewal. Who today can doubt that education is the key to meeting the two most important challenges of our time promoting sustainable development and nurturing a culture of peaceful coexistence? Education is vital to building up the critical mass of knowledge and the technical capabilities required for economic and social progress and to reducing the unacceptable inequalities of wealth and opportunity within and between nations. More importantly, perhaps, it is our best hope to ultimately determine whether scientific and technological invention serves to benefit or to blight human existence. There is no more important task for education at the present time than to:

- Educate our children and young people with a sense of openness and comprehension toward other people, their diverse cultures and histories and their fundamental shared humanity.

- Teach them the importance of refusing violence and adopting peaceful means for resolving disagreements and conflicts.
- Call for the rejection of the logic of force in favour of the force of logic.

I believe that these principles are essential to the pursuit of creativity and innovation - the treasure of mankind and the source of human progress - in an ever more interdependent world. This can not be realised unless all of us are highly committed to the principle of "education for all throughout life - culture for all throughout life".

CONCLUSION

I will conclude by highlighting and stressing some key issues in educational policies. In this respect, I fully agree with UNESCO's final report on cultural policies for development which affirms that:

- Cultural policy, as one of the main components of endogenous and sustainable development policy, should be implemented in co-ordination with policy in other social areas, on the basis of an integrated approach.
- Cultural policies for the new millennium must be anticipating, responding to persistent problems as well as to new needs.
- Effective participation in the information society and the mastery by everyone of information and communication technology constitute a significant dimension of any cultural policy.

Lastly, I would like to stress a highly critical factor for achieving a sustainable development process, and no doubt that you play a leading role in its realisation, namely, reducing the present dichotomy between culture and education and rapidly integrating culture into our academic curriculum at all educational levels. This is the only way to produce the risk-taker individual who is so crucial for sustainable development because risk without knowledge is so dangerous and knowledge without risk is useless.

I would also like to remind you that when culture is understood as the basis of development and when policies for development become profoundly sensitive to and inspired by culture, rest assured, that the funds necessary for broadening educational policies, in order to achieve this objective, will be released by the government.